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**"THE LORD'S WILL BE DONE":  
A STUDY OF ORGANIZATION IN THE U.S. ARMY CHAPLAINCY  
DURING THE CIVIL WAR**

**BY**

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**"THE LORD'S WILL BE DONE": A Study of Organization in  
the U.S. Army Chaplaincy During the Civil War**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper examines the background, organization, and duties of U.S. Army chaplains during the Civil War to determine factors which helped or hindered their efforts to provide religious support to soldiers. The research examines the background of Congressional and Army actions pertaining to the organization and support of the chaplaincy. It examines the contemporary memoirs and previous histories to determine the organization and duties of the chaplaincy. The research determines that the issue of establishment of religion fueled a continuous reluctance of Congress and the Army to promulgate laws and regulations needed to guide the chaplaincy. The result was an Army Chaplaincy of uneven capabilities and qualifications, no central direction, and few specified duties. In the absence of central direction, chaplains provided soldier support through their own faith, ingenuity, and desire to serve.







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# **THE LORD'S WILL BE DONE: A STUDY OF ORGANIZATION IN THE US ARMY CHAPLAINCY DURING THE CIVIL WAR**

In 1861, when a chaplain asked for lumber to construct a chapel with volunteer troop labor, Secretary of War Cameron authorized the use of lumber, and replied only: "The Lord's will be done."<sup>1</sup> Fortunately, the Lord/God/Allah/Buddha/Spirit has provided the needed organization, funding, and duties for the U.S. Army Chaplaincy in all conflicts. But the U.S. Army and the Congress often hesitate to establish laws, regulations, and funding for the chaplaincy. Chaplains often accomplished the religious support mission through their own ingenuity, seeking help from outside the Army or informally within the institution.

Chaplains, along with their commanders, always recognized the importance of their religious support in military operations. They existed in the Civil War, as always, to

- **Nurture the living**
- **Comfort the wounded**
- **Honor the dead.**<sup>2</sup>

This paper will examine the background, organization, and duties of the U.S. Army Chaplaincy in the Civil War, including the reluctance of Congress to establish laws regarding the chaplaincy. From this background in the Civil War, we can learn



some of the origins of the governmental concerns over a possible establishment of religion which still influence the mission of military chaplains.

## BACKGROUND

From the beginning of the Republic, the Congress struggled with the constitutionality of an established chaplaincy. The Continental Militia had regimental chaplains, following the British system.<sup>3</sup> All of the Federalists accepted this chaplaincy, and George Washington ensured the inclusion of regimental chaplains in the Revolution.<sup>4</sup> But even at this early time, two years into the Revolutionary War, the Continental Congress sought to reduce the expenses of chaplains. Washington protested a proposal in 1777 to substitute brigade chaplains for regimental chaplains, since he felt that the latter system:

Gives every Regiment an opportunity of having a chaplain of their own religious Sentiments, it is founded on a plan of more generous toleration...a Brigade...composed of four or five, perhaps...six Regiments, there might be so many different modes of worship.<sup>5</sup>

But James Madison, who had supported the creation of the Army Chaplaincy in 1775 and throughout his Presidency, wrote a letter in the 1840s opposing federal funding for congressional chaplains. This letter was widely quoted through the 1850's as a reason to oppose federal funding for any chaplaincy, including military chaplains.<sup>6</sup> And the timing was right.



During the 1850's, memorials and resolutions opposing the continuation or funding of congressional and military chaplains plagued the House and Senate. All of these memorials and resolutions were referred initially to the House and Senate Judiciary Committees. While some of these memorials were from citizens of border states, like the one from the "Particular Baptists" of Tennessee, others were from mainline faith groups in northern states like Pennsylvania. Quakers, too, and other peace denominations, were opposed to any federal taxation supporting military chaplains. The 32nd, 33rd, and 34th Congresses all received and acted upon these memorials and overtures from 1851 to 1857.<sup>7</sup>

In the 33rd Congress, the House Judiciary Committee considered the memorial from Particular Baptists of Henderson County, Tennessee. This memorial petitioned that all Army, Navy, and Congressional chaplaincies should be eliminated, since the use of taxpayer's money for this purpose violated Article Six of the Constitution, which states that "no religious test shall ever be required as qualification to any office of public trust under the United States." Most of the previous and subsequent memorials focused on Article 1 of the Amendments to the Constitution (the Bill of Rights), regarding the establishment of religion, and the free exercise thereof. But the House Judiciary Committee replied to this memorial that:



While your committee believe that neither Congress nor the army and navy should be deprived of the service of chaplains, they freely concede that the ecclesiastical and civil powers have been, and should continue to be, entirely divorced from each other...There is a great and very prevalent error on this subject...In the opinion that those who organized this government did not legislate on religion...The error has risen from the belief that there is no legislation unless in permissive or restricting enactments.<sup>8</sup>

Representative James Meacham of Vermont served as Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee throughout this period, and provided this report, which rejected the overture, to the floor of the House.<sup>9</sup> The House adopted the committee's recommendation to retain the chaplaincies. Mr. Meacham's committee found itself with continual work in defense of the chaplaincy and clergy.

Less than two months later, in May 1854, Mr. Meacham defended the clergy in a lengthy speech on the floor of the House. An uproar had occurred between the pro-slavery and anti-slavery States over a memorial signed by 3000 clergy, supporting the Nebraska bill (later the Kansas-Nebraska Act) and proposing the extension of the number of slave-free states. The border and southern states' representatives were furious with the clergy for meddling in secular matters. Particularly, they were angry that the clergy began the memorial using the usual opening, "In the Name of God, Amen". The clergy being considered closer to God than average petitioners, both houses expressed anger at



this use of the common greeting, feeling that the clergy intended to declare God clearly on one side of the issue.<sup>10</sup>

In 1856, near the end of this period of congressional debates, Lorenzo Day Johnson, a well-known clergyman and author, defended the chaplaincies as he addressed the Congress and newspapers with his famous treatise on "Chaplains of the General Government, with Objections to Their Employment Considered". He methodically dealt with the history of objections to the chaplaincy, and provided overwhelming historical support for its continuation.<sup>11</sup>

Congress clearly remembered these frequent debates over the establishment and pay of military chaplains, which had just concluded a few years earlier, as the Civil War began. They also remembered the letter of the aged James Madison, at that time a revered hero. This combination of circumstances added to the continual American reluctance to promulgate any laws that might indicate a tendency toward an establishment of religion.

In fairness to the Civil War Congresses and the U.S. Army, chaplains were very low on their scope of interest. They constituted a small portion of the Army's resources, and the need to raise, fund, and train Volunteer regiments certainly took precedence over the small concerns of the chaplaincy. On the other hand, the Army and the Congress seemed to learn quickly that chaplains were a great resource at low cost for a



regiment of 1,000 soldiers. As casualties occurred in huge numbers, the chaplain out on the battlefield dealing with the wounded and dead, as well as chaplains at the field hospitals, provided tremendous support.<sup>12</sup> Chaplains provided the normal ministry of their own presence, representing God to the commanders and soldiers before, during, and after the deadly battles.

#### ORGANIZATION

At the beginning of the Civil War, 26 chaplains served the US Army in 30 Post Chaplain positions established in a law of 1849.<sup>13</sup> These Post Chaplains served in only a few of the more than 100 posts and forts scattered throughout the country, primarily in the West.<sup>14</sup> By regulation, the post's Council of Administration appointed the chaplain, with the proceedings forwarded to the Army Adjutant General for issuance of the chaplain's commission.<sup>15</sup> In the Mexican War, any post that had more than half its soldiers "deployed" to the War, was directed to send its chaplain with the soldiers. But no regimental chaplains existed at that time.<sup>16</sup>

After the attack on Ft. Sumter, Lincoln called for militias, to be in service for 90 days. The states took over the process of raising the new Volunteer militia regiments.



The Army issued General Order 15 (Organization of Volunteer Regiments) and General Order 16 (Organization of new units in the Regular Army) on May 4, 1861. Both orders provided for the inclusion of regimental chaplains. The passages authorizing these chaplains are not found in the normal listing of the regimental officers, but thrown down as short paragraphs amidst the discussion of bands and sutlers:

There will be allowed to each regiment one chaplain, who will be appointed by the regimental commander on the vote of the field officers and company commanders on duty with the regiment at the time the appointment is to be made. The chaplain so appointed must be a regularly ordained minister of some Christian denomination, and will receive the pay and allowances of captain of cavalry.<sup>17</sup>

The chaplain paragraphs in these General Orders basically restate Article XXIV of the Articles of War in effect at the beginning of the Civil War, although now giving a vote on the chaplain to all field officers and not stating any need to consider the preferences of the soldiers:

#### ARTICLE XXIV

##### CHAPLAINS

208. One chaplain shall be allowed to each regiment of the army, to be appointed by the colonel, on the nomination of the company commanders. None but regularly ordained ministers of some Christian denomination, however, shall be eligible to appointment and the wishes of the soldiers of the regiment shall be allowed their full and due weight in making the selection. The proceedings in each case will be immediately forwarded to the Adjutant-General's office, the name and denomination of the



chaplain being in every case reported. Chaplains will only be allowed to regiments which are embodied and serving together as one whole- not to regiments of which the companies are serving at different stations.<sup>18</sup>

Operating on these orders, Volunteer regiments elected chaplains after their formation. In many cases, the chaplain's election followed the formation and recording of the initial mustering roll of the regiment.<sup>19</sup> But General Order 44 specified that chaplains were to be mustered "in the same manner as prescribed for commissioned officers"<sup>20</sup>, and the muster-in roll with the chaplain's name was duly sent to the War Department. At the same time, the chaplain usually received a commission from the Governor of the state, if in a Volunteer regiment, followed by a certificate of appointment from the War Department some months later.

However, the states had uneven rules for commissioning. Indiana and Maryland did not provide commissions to their chaplains. Wisconsin and Rhode Island commissioned only some of their chaplains, after they applied for commissions and were mustered-in through the War Department.<sup>21</sup> This discrepancy probably accounts for Wisconsin's nine-month delay in submitting mustering-in papers on Mrs. Ella Hobart, and the tardy denial of her commission as chaplain of the First Wisconsin Artillery Regiment by Secretary of War Stanton.<sup>22</sup> New Hampshire's



chaplains held the most tenuous positions: commission certificates were provided for a chaplain "to hold his office, as such chaplain, during the pleasure of the colonel of the regiment".<sup>23</sup> Chaplains from New Hampshire were probably reluctant to challenge the morality of any actions by the commander or officers of the regiment.

If appointed in a Regular regiment, the same rules of election applied, but the chaplain received a commission from the President. In fact, Father William Corby includes a short memoir in his book of at least one chaplain who held first a commission from the governor of New York, as a Volunteer regimental chaplain, and later a commission from the President as a Regular chaplain. Father C. L. Egan's regiment served its three-month term and was disbanded. He was then appointed as "chaplain at large" on the staff of the V Corps Commander, Army of the Potomac, to serve all of the Catholic soldiers in his Corps. While Father Egan then received a commission from the President, the basis for appointment as other than a regimental chaplain is not known. Perhaps he was appointed, through the good graces of the Corps Commander and one of his regimental commanders, against the unfilled position of a Regular regiment. In any case, he did not serve as a Corps chaplain, but was appointed to care for Catholic soldiers in the Corps, in the



position of chaplain, without rank, held by all other chaplains.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, the shortage of Roman Catholic chaplains was critical, then as now: in 1862, the proportion of Roman Catholic to Protestant soldiers was one to six, but only 22 priests existed of 472 US Army chaplains.<sup>25</sup> General Orders 15 and 16 contributed to this shortage: with the exception of a few regiments, as those in the Irish Brigade, most units had few Catholic officers. Therefore, the election of a Roman Catholic priest was unlikely in the majority of regiments.

Similarly, the election of a Jewish chaplain occurred in only a few regiments. The 5<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Cavalry acted first, electing Michael Allen, a Hebrew teacher then working as a liquor dealer, as its chaplain in the summer of 1861. The regimental commander, as well as many officers and men, were Jewish. The governor signed Allen's commission, and the entire regiment appreciated his service. His sermons were directed toward both Jew and Christian, and all went well until an overzealous member of the U.S. Christian Commission, a private agency, visited the unit outside Washington and found an unordained rabbi serving as chaplain. Aware of the General Orders and subsequent law on chaplains as "members of a Christian denomination", the USCC worker wrote letters to the conservative religious newspapers. Allen did not want to fight



the issue and was forced to resign. But Rabbi Arnold Fischel, a good lobbyist, began a campaign to change the law. His campaign ended successfully on July 17, 1862, when the law was changed to read "a regularly ordained minister of some religious denomination". Later, at least one rabbi served as chaplain in the 54<sup>th</sup> New York Volunteer Regiment and two rabbis as hospital chaplains.<sup>26</sup> In this battle, too, the Congress very reluctantly amended the law to provide for Jewish chaplains, although they recognized the need for their service. The battle lasted more than a year and the Congress only acquiesced when it had eliminated any reference to the religion of the chaplain. In fact, those remembering the previous memorials invoking Article 6 of the Constitution, probably felt relieved that no religious test of any specific faith group was now required for the appointment of chaplains.

While debates arose concerning the faith groups of chaplains, other serious concerns surfaced in the first months of the war. Since no screening for the qualifications of chaplains existed, some unqualified, elderly, or unhealthy chaplains were elected.<sup>27</sup> And, of course, these were the ones most noticed and written about. Two early reports should be mentioned, only because they are frequently quoted and might misstate the actual situation.



First, there is the famous letter of December 5, 1861 from the Paymaster General of the Army to Senator Henry Wilson on ways to reduce military costs. Benjamin F. Larned, the Paymaster General, objected to paying chaplains as captains of cavalry, and stated that many chaplains were "utterly worthless of their positions". He stated that a Regimental commander allegedly appointed one chaplain because he was a good French chef, but not a member of the clergy.<sup>28</sup> This statement by the Paymaster was based on a rumor he had heard, and certainly reflected his own opinion on chaplains; but writers often cite it to prove the dismal state of chaplains in the Civil War.<sup>29</sup>

The second oft-cited quote, from a lieutenant of a Pennsylvania Regiment, tells about his chaplain using old sermons that were totally inappropriate. The lieutenant wrote in his memoirs that the chaplain: "took an old piece of faded yellow manuscript and...discussed infant baptism and closed with an earnest appeal, touchingly eloquent, to mothers. I'm sure there wasn't a mother in the regiment, and not more than two or three infants."<sup>30</sup>

Many of the initial chaplains were older, as the chaplain preaching about infant baptism, and ill prepared for the transition from parish life to the rough life of battle, encampment, and long marches. Of approximately 300 chaplains entering in 1861, the average age was 44 years old.<sup>31</sup> Chaplain



McCabe reports that Chaplain Brown, a fellow prisoner in Libby Prison, was about 80 years old.<sup>32</sup> Some clergy were unable to make the transition, even in their pastoral duties.

Additionally, many of these older chaplains quickly became ill and were unable to stay with the regiments for long. As a result, the Army had a shortage of chaplains after the first few months of the war. While a total of about 2500 chaplains served the U.S. Army during the Civil War, not more than about 600 served at any time.<sup>33</sup>

But the YMCA and its wartime organization, the United States Christian Commission (USCC) raised the strongest voice against weak chaplains. While their objections were clothed in the charges of laziness and unworthiness, their actual motivation was no doubt their desire to replace many old-line Protestant denomination chaplains, or the occasional rabbi, with their own evangelical and revivalist clergy.

In 1857-58, the YMCA successfully led Businessmen's Revivals across the nation and gained much power within the business community and the Congress.<sup>34</sup> The YMCA embraced an evangelical fervor they found absent in many traditional Episcopal, Congregational, Presbyterian, and Lutheran clergy. While most Methodists and some Presbyterians (New Side)<sup>35</sup> embraced the revival movement, the revivalists quickly



established their own criteria for good clergy and bad clergy, even among the latter groups.

From November 1861 until July 1862, the Army Committee of the YMCA and the USCC petitioned first Secretary of War Simon Cameron, and then the Congress, to remove unsuitable chaplains.<sup>36</sup> Congress' initial solution was to attempt to lower the pay of chaplains, believing somehow that lower pay would drive out substandard chaplains. A humorous debate occurred as the Senate tried to figure out the pay received.<sup>37</sup> Senators Olin, Fessenden and others defended chaplains and their good work. Sen. Fessenden stated:

It is true, as the gentleman has said [Olin], that the labors of chaplains whether at the post or in the hospital or volunteer forces, are not understood or appreciated as they should be. They are, I believe, underrated by gentlemen upon the floor of this House. But there seems to be a disposition-I have seen it manifested in the House by gentlemen here-to reduce their salaries, on the ground that their services are not at all proportionate to the salaries they receive. Now, Mr. Speaker, I am persuaded that if gentlemen on this floor will really set about it, and will make the requisite inquiries, they will find that these chaplains are men who render services that are not disproportionate to the salaries they receive; that they render more services than other gentlemen or other officers in the Army in proportion to the salaries they receive.<sup>38</sup>

One member, Sen. Holman, objected to the pay of chaplains, when compared to the pay of common soldiers, Sen. Dunn replied: "If my colleague will introduce a bill to reduce the pay of members of Congress to that of common soldiers, I will vote for



it."<sup>39</sup> Needless to say, that comment led to an end of any immediate action on the reduction in chaplain's pay.

But eventually in the summer of 1862, the pay of chaplains was reduced by \$350, from approximately \$1700 (total compensation) to \$1200 per annum, plus two rations a day.<sup>40</sup> And the same Act of July 17, 1862 established some screening criteria: no individual was to be commissioned a chaplain,

Who is not a regularly ordained minister of some religious denomination and who does not present testimonials of his present good standing, with recommendations for his appointment as an army chaplain from some authorized ecclesiastical body or from not less than five accredited ministers belonging to said religious denomination.<sup>41</sup>

Once again, the Congress shied away from making any pronouncements that might challenge Article 6 or the First Amendment to the Constitution. Instead of establishing qualifications as to education or worthiness, the Congress left the matter of the credentials of chaplains up to individual religious groups large enough to include five ministers, and their selection remained with the individual Regiments, Posts, or Hospitals.

This newly enacted legislation was soon enforced in General Order No. 91. GO 91 followed the law, and required commanders to evaluate the "fitness, efficiency, and qualifications of the chaplains...and to muster out of service such chaplains as were



not appointed in conformity with ...this act, and who have not faithfully discharged the duties of chaplains."<sup>42</sup>

When commanders responded and eliminated the least worthy chaplains, the YMCA and USCC were quick to step up with their own proposal. Just a month after the legislation passed, Mr. Stuart of the USCC offered to Secretary of War Stanton that the USCC "furnish, free of expense to the Government, two chaplains for each division of the Army".<sup>43</sup> The reply from P.H. Watson, one of Stanton's assistants, quoted the Surgeon General and read: "It is my opinion that the services of the chaplains here offered, being entirely voluntary, would be entirely independent of military authority and I recommend that this offer be declined."<sup>44</sup>

Rebuffed in their offer, the USCC continued to provide "messengers" to brigades or regiments which did not have chaplains, and to Division, Corps, and Army headquarters without chaplains. A Permanent Station Agent served at each Corps headquarters. And they assisted the Army chaplains by providing tent tarps as chapels, tracts, and other supplies, since none were provided directly by the Army.<sup>45</sup>

While the Congress continued to tread carefully in the area of legislation on chaplains, President Lincoln had no such compunctions. He included a plea for hospital chaplains in his



Dec. 1861 address to the joint houses of Congress, now known as the State of the Union message:

By mere omission, I presume, Congress has failed to provide chaplains for hospitals occupied by volunteers...These gentlemen, I understand, entered upon the duties designated... [after President Lincoln sent letters requesting their services]. I therefore recommend that they be compensated at the same rate as chaplains in the Army. I further support that general provision be made for chaplains to serve at hospitals as well as with regiments.<sup>46</sup>

The President graciously presumed that Congress had merely forgotten to supply hospital chaplains. But it is interesting to note that this paragraph was included in only five small paragraphs on the US Army's needs in the first year of the war. Lincoln no doubt included this provision in his message, since he knew the difficulties and debates the Congress had in enacting legislation pertaining to chaplains. An Act of May 20, 1862 included the requested provision for hospital chaplains.<sup>47</sup>

Congress and the Army failed to provide for organization of the chaplaincy above the regiment. Indeed Paymaster General Larned recommended eliminating regimental chaplains and replacing them with brigade chaplains, just as the Continental Congress had attempted during the Revolution.<sup>48</sup> But chaplains did meet informally to discuss their duties, pay, and equipment requirements. Chaplains often recount meetings of small numbers of chaplains in their memoirs. Chaplain Corby talked about several of those meetings among the Catholic chaplains in the



Irish Brigade, citing one in June 1862 in which four of them met to deal with theological issues, including the need for a bishop to make decisions on their behalf. On another occasion, Corby talks about meeting with another priest of the Brigade, and their planning: "We put our heads together to plan out the spiritual work for the coming campaign".<sup>49</sup>

Chaplain John Stuckenburg, a Lutheran born in Germany, described a "very interesting" chaplain's meeting at Stoneman's Station, Virginia, attended by 15 to 20 chaplains. He was particularly pleased to meet two other Lutheran chaplains, since he said: "I am surrounded by Methodist Chaplains, who are very clever, but lack cultivation."<sup>50</sup> And often the chaplains of a Corps would meet during winter quarters at the USCC headquarters for the Corps. Chaplains assigned in the Washington area met early in the war to discuss rank and pay.<sup>51</sup>

Chaplains established formal professional organizations, called Chaplains' Associations in the east and Councils of Chaplains in the west.<sup>52</sup> These groups met to discuss common problems of pay, their ambiguous rank, and the many chaplain vacancies occurring in regiments as the war progressed.

While no formal seniority existed, since all regimental chaplains were equal in rank, chaplains did establish some sense of seniority based on mustering-in date or perhaps even civilian position in the faith group represented. Chaplain Clay Trumbull



recalls being the one summoned to speak with soldiers about to be executed: "I, being the senior chaplain in the division..."<sup>53</sup> Chaplain Trumbull was the longest serving chaplain in his division. Chaplain William Corby, who had been provost of Notre Dame University prior to the war, gave guidance to fellow chaplain priests in Roman Catholic matters.

Although they lacked organizational framework, the chaplains were even more bothered by the lack of accepted rank. The initial general orders provided for pay at the rank of captain of cavalry. But without any formal designation of status, some confusion existed as to their authority. Chaplain Thomas Ouellet, an Irish Brigade priest with a strong French accent, defined his status very clearly to a confused captain of the regiment. One Sunday morning, en route to mass, Father Ouellet chided the captain for using profanity in front of his soldiers, an act then punishable for officers under the Articles of War. The captain replied, "Do you know, sir, I am a captain of this regiment, and you are only a captain of cavalry on detached service?" In his homily at mass, Father Ouellet said:

I have been told today, by an officer of my regiment, when reproving him for profanity in the presence of his men...that I was only a captain of cavalry...I never intended to interfere in the discipline of the regiment, but I want to tell that captain, as well as all here assembled to worship God, that I did not enter the Army as a captain of cavalry, but as a soldier of the Saviour to preach the doctrine of our holy Church, and I shall, on all occasions, as



one of the spiritual directors of this command, reprove vice, and preach to you, undefiled, the religion of your fathers.<sup>54</sup>

By July 1864, Congress finally passed legislation specifying the rank of chaplains as captain, and putting them into the mustering rolls of a regiment's officers immediately below the surgeon. The same law established that they would be entitled to pensions and to military pay while held prisoner or sick in the hospital.<sup>55</sup>

The organization of the Civil War chaplaincy suffered from a lack of hierarchical organization, and confusion over status. The Congress and the Army both contributed to this problem, due to their reticence in promulgating laws or regulations pertaining to the establishment of religion. As a result of this hesitancy, Congress and the Army also prescribed few duties for chaplains.

#### DUTIES

As Regimental chaplains entered the US Army in the Civil War, many expected to perform the same duties as those of the parish, considering the soldiers to be merely "congregations in uniform".<sup>56</sup> And few duties were prescribed for chaplains by law or regulation. General Order 49, of August 1861, stated that chaplains,

shall be required to report to the colonel commanding the regiment to which he is attached, at the end of



each quarter, the moral and religious condition of the regiment, and such suggestions as may conduce to the social happiness and moral improvement of the troops.<sup>57</sup>

In the Act of April 9, 1864, this requirement was changed to require Regimental chaplains to submit monthly reports directly to the Adjutant General. The same law established the requirement, for the first time, for chaplains to conduct religious services each Sunday and at all burials.<sup>58</sup>

Although the Congress and the Army prescribed few duties, President Lincoln issued an order, in November 1862, requesting an "orderly observance of the sabbath", and provision made for the "sacred rights of Christian soldiers and sailors."<sup>59</sup>

Chaplains themselves developed lists of duties, as they served in the Army. They expected to lead worship and conduct rites and sacraments according to the dictates and liturgies of their denominations. As they had much closer association with chaplains of other denominations, their understanding of other forms of worship and their ability to work together increased.<sup>60</sup> Soon they recognized that Sunday services at 1100 might not always be possible, as units moved or prepared to engage in combat. But they adapted their worship to the circumstances, conducting worship as needed or appropriate, including hurried prayers just before battle.

Pastoral counseling of soldiers occurred whenever needed and possible, sometimes under a tree or in visits to field



hospitals, as regimental chaplains visited the wounded and sick. As the number of apprehended deserters increased, and they were scheduled for execution, chaplains were always called to pray with, perform last rites, and comfort those about to be executed. In several cases, they attempted to intercede and request clemency for those facing execution.<sup>61</sup>

Chaplains also honored the dead by performing burial rites and memorial ceremonies for units after battles. Among the most interesting, performed in the midst of battle, was one conducted by Chaplain Clay Trumbull of the 10<sup>th</sup> Connecticut Volunteers. He describes a fierce attack on their lines at Bermuda Hundred, near Richmond, in the spring of 1864. A soldier's head was blown off about six feet away from Chaplain Trumbull. A few minutes later, his unit repelled the attack, and Chaplain Trumbull and a few soldiers dug a grave, wrapped the body in an army blanket, and conducted a short graveside burial service where the soldier fell. "That entire incident occupied scarcely more than thirty minutes. It made no show in the official report, but it filled more hearts than one at the time, and it has a permanent place in my memory."<sup>62</sup>

Another burial had an even more prominent place in Chaplain Trumbull's memory, since he was present to say prayers for the dead, and captured while removing bodies from the battlefield. Thereafter, he became a prisoner in Columbia, South Carolina and



Libby Prison in Richmond. This burial was one conducted by the Confederate Army for Colonel Robert Shaw, Regimental Commander of the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Infantry, US Colored Troops, and his unit after the battle for Fort Wagner:

The body of Colonel Putnam, of the Seventh New Hampshire, who fell while leading his command in the assault, was returned to the Union lines the next day, on request for it by a flag of truce. He was a graduate of West Point, and was well known by the Confederate officers. Special respect was shown to his memory by his enemies. But, on the contrary, the body of Colonel Shaw, of a choice Boston family, who was killed at the head of his regiment, the Fifty-fourth Massachusetts colored troops, was treated with special indignity, being thrown into the common pit with the soldiers of his command, 'under a layer or two of his own dead negroes,' as the Charleston Courier reported it. A request for the return of his body was refused at the time Colonel Putnam's body was sent back. Yet Colonel Shaw's name and fame, and the place of his burial, are more prominent in history in consequence. A soldier's burial is in the thought of a soldier as he faces death; but his fame is surer than his burial.<sup>63</sup>

In addition to required reports, worship services, pastoral counseling, visitation to the wounded, and memorials for the dead, chaplains frequently advised their commanders on morals and the morale of their soldiers. Many felt it their duty to quell the use of profanity, deal with gambling in the unit, and let the commander know when individual soldiers needed help.

Sometimes, commanders asked chaplains for their opinion on matters of morale or justice. Chaplain James Crane, Regimental chaplain for the 21<sup>st</sup> Illinois Volunteers, recalls his commander,



Colonel Ulysses S. Grant, asking whether he'd been too harsh on a couple of soldiers who had been absent. The two soldiers had left camp and gone to round up secessionists near Salt River, Missouri. The chaplain replied that he did not feel qualified to comment on military discipline. Grant replied:

I don't ask for a military opinion; I ask for your opinion as a citizen. Chaplains are not supposed to be military men; they are supposed to carry into camp the same feelings and views of justice and right they had in civil life.

Chaplain Crane then replied that he thought the punishment was too strong for the offense (tying the soldiers to a tree for six hours). Grant stroked his beard, thought for a few minutes, and ordered the guard to release the soldiers.<sup>64</sup>

With few prescribed duties, some chaplains picked up extra duties, like those of unit postmaster and librarian when in winter camps or fixed posts. But they used the library opportunity to obtain religious books. They also passed out religious tracts and Bibles, most obtained from the American Bible Society, USCC, and their own religious denominations. Contrary to popular belief, Chaplain Brown points out that most soldiers were literate and appreciated the reading materials they received.<sup>65</sup>

Chaplains performed a wide variety of duties, as they saw their responsibilities to nurture the living, comfort the wounded, and honor the dead. With little guidance from Congress



or the Army, they accomplished the mission of providing religious support. Although they had detractors, particularly in the early months of the war, most appreciated and recognized their important work. Three chaplains, Milton Haney, John Whitehead, and Francis Hall, received the Medal of Honor for their service.<sup>66</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the background, organization, and duties of chaplains in the Civil War. It has shown that chaplains provided the best religious support of which they were capable, under very difficult and undefined conditions. The reluctance of Congress and the Army to promulgate sufficient law or regulation for the organization and duties of chaplains did not stop the chaplains. They provided religious support through their own faith, ingenuity, and desire to serve the soldiers. The Congress and Army still have a reluctance to regulate the chaplaincy to any great extent, so some problems continue. But chaplains and their religious support remain very important to soldiers and to the Army. That importance is shown in this story, related by a chaplain at a Sunday night worship service in 1862. He referred to a service in a field hospital, among the many amputees:

Brethren, I had service this afternoon in the first division hospital of the second corps. The



surgeon in charge, before prayer, asked all who desired to be prayed for, to raise their hands, and nearly every man who had a hand, raised it. Let us remember them in our prayers tonight.<sup>67</sup>

WORD COUNT = 5731



## END NOTES

<sup>1</sup> United States War Department, The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), S.1, V. 51, Pt I, 388 (hereafter referred to as "OR").

<sup>2</sup> Department of the Army, FM 16-1, Religious Support, November 1989, 5-2.

<sup>3</sup> A. Ray Appelquist, ed., Church, State, and Chaplaincy: Essays and Statements on the American Chaplaincy System (Washington DC: General Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel, 1969), 71.

<sup>4</sup> Anson Phelps Stokes, Church and State in the United States (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), V. I, 268.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., V. I, 271.

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Fleet, "Madison's Detached Memoranda", William and Mary Quarterly, 3d Series, III, Oct 1946, 558.

<sup>7</sup> Cited by Appelquist, pp.77-79.

<sup>8</sup> Cited by Stokes, II, 132, from Report No. 124, House of Representatives, 33d Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, March 27, 1854.

<sup>9</sup> Congressional Globe, 33d Cong...1<sup>st</sup> Sess., (Washington: Blair and Rives March 27, 1854), 758.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., Appendix to Congressional Globe, 33d Cong..1<sup>st</sup> Sess., May 18, 1854, 837.

<sup>11</sup> Lorenzo D. Johnson, Chaplains of the General Government, with Objections to Their Employment Considered (New York: Sheldon, Blakeman, and Company, 1856) 19-21.

<sup>12</sup> Roy J. Honeywell, Chaplains of the United States Army (Washington DC: Office of the Chief of Chaplains, Department of the Army, 1958), 88.

<sup>13</sup> Congressional Globe, 30 Cong., 2 Sess., (1849), 644-56.



<sup>14</sup> Herman A. Norton, Struggling for Recognition: The United States Army Chaplaincy, 1791-1865 (Washington DC: Office of the Chief of Chaplains, Department of the Army, 1977), 83.

<sup>15</sup> William Y. Brown, The Army Chaplain: His Office, Duties, and Responsibilities, and the Means of Aiding Him (Philadelphia: W.S.&A. Martien, 1863), 120.

<sup>16</sup> Stokes, V. III, 112.

<sup>17</sup> OR, Series 3, V. 1, 154, 157.

<sup>18</sup> Department of War, Revised Regulations for the Army (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1861), 36.

<sup>19</sup> David T. Hedrick & Gordon Barry Davis Jr., Eds., I'm Surrounded by Methodists...Diary of John H.W. Stuckenberg, Chaplain of the 145<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry (Gettysburg, PA: Thomas Publications, 1995), 11.

<sup>20</sup> OR, Series 3, V. 1, 327.

<sup>21</sup> Brown, 90-91.

<sup>22</sup> Norton, 86.

<sup>23</sup> Brown, 90.

<sup>24</sup> William F. Corby, Memoirs of Chaplain Life: Three Years with the Irish Brigade in the Army of the Potomac. Ed. Lawrence Frederick Kohl. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1992), 324.

<sup>25</sup> Gardiner H. Shattuck Jr, A Shield and Hiding Place: The Religious Life of the Civil War Armies (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987), 55.

<sup>26</sup> Norton, 91-93.

<sup>27</sup> Rollin W. Quimby, "Congress and the Civil War Chaplaincy," Civil War History 10 (June 1964), 249.

<sup>28</sup> OR, Series 3, V. 1, 729.



<sup>29</sup> Cf. Honeywell, 108; Norton, 88; Bell Irvin Wiley, "'Holy Joes' of the Sixties: A Study of Civil War Chaplains," The Huntington Library Quarterly, XVI (1953), 295.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Wiley, 295, citing "Captain Samuel Craig's Memoirs of Civil War and Reconstruction", Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine, XIII (1930), 233.

<sup>31</sup> Norton, 85.

<sup>32</sup> Frank Milton Bristol, The Life of Chaplain McCabe (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1908), 137.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Honeywell, 120, estimating 3000 chaplains, since 2300 names are known; Shattuck, 62, estimating 2300; Quimby, 37, estimating 2300; Norton, 108, estimating over 2500 regimental chaplains.

<sup>34</sup> Shattuck, 83.

<sup>35</sup> "New Side" Presbyterians were those who embraced the Second Great Awakening and the Businessmen's Revival. In 1856, the "Old Side" and "New side" Presbyterians split into two denominations for a period of twenty years.

<sup>36</sup> Norton, 89; Quimby, "Congress and the Civil War Chaplaincy", Civil War History, 10, (June 1964), 251.

<sup>37</sup> Congressional Globe, 37<sup>th</sup> Cong, 2d Sess, March 5, 1862, 1086.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Norton, 89.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. citing The Public Statutes at Large of the United States of America, V XII, 1862, 595.

<sup>42</sup> OR, Series 3, V. II, 278 and Norton, 90.

<sup>43</sup> Moss, Lemuel, Annals of the United States Christian Commission (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1868) 138.



<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>46</sup> OR, Series 3, V. II, 712.

<sup>47</sup> Department of War, Revised Regulations, 537.

<sup>48</sup> OR, Series 3, V. I, 729.

<sup>49</sup> Corby, 36,81,216. Cf. Dr. Boone Bartholomees, "Staff Organization of the Armies of the Potomac and Northern Virginia", lecture, Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, PA, April 1997, cited with permission.

<sup>50</sup> Hedrick and Davis, 56.

<sup>51</sup> Norton, 107.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>53</sup> H. Clay Trumbull, War Memories of an Army Chaplain (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1898) 192.

<sup>54</sup> Corby, 301.

<sup>55</sup> OR, Series 3, V. 4, 227; Congressional Globe, 38 Cong., 1 Sess. (1864), 1164.

<sup>56</sup> Norton, 96.

<sup>57</sup> OR, Series 3, V. I, 382.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., Series 3, V. 4, 117.

<sup>59</sup> Brown, 77.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Trumbull, 192-95.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 219.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 212.



<sup>64</sup> James L. Crane, "Conversations between Grant and his Chaplain: Reminiscences and Anecdotes", cited from McClure's Magazine, 1896. Available from <http://www.lib.siu.edu/projects/usgrant/chaplain>. Accessed 15 September 1998.

<sup>65</sup> Brown, 72: "There are comparatively but few men in the army who cannot read."

<sup>66</sup> Norton, 106,111.

<sup>67</sup> United States Christian Commission, Christ in the Army, 83.







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